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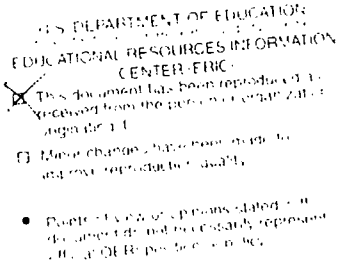
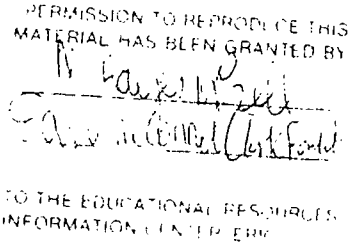
ABSTRACT

In Louisville (Kentucky), the design and effort that foster educational changes are yielding rewards in three of the district's middle schools, participants in the High Project. The High Project, which began in 1989 with the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, attempts to provide high expectations, high content, and high support for low-income students in the middle grades. The efforts in these three schools and the connection of these efforts with reforms stemming from the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 are described. In taking a direction that was clearly school focused and was developed with and for teachers who participated in planning and implementing programs, the project has begun to demonstrate the possibilities for reform in urban middle schools, including the most disadvantaged. The high content and high support of the project have solidified teachers' own expectations of themselves and their expectations for meaningful professional development. The empowered teachers in project schools are in turn empowering students. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

Empowered Teachers, Empowered Learners:

Reform in Progress in Louisville's High[5] Middle Schools





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Introduction

In urban middle schools, reforms in teaching and learning do not come about by accident; they happen only because professional educators combine thoughtful program development with hard work in ways that are powerful enough to change even the most entrenched classroom practices and bureaucratic habits. In Louisville, Kentucky, the design and effort that foster such changes are yielding rewards in three of the district's middle schools: Iroquois, Southern, and Western Middle Schools. Over the past three years, educators in these schools, participants in the district's High[5] Project, have increasingly taken the risks necessary to change school and classroom conditions to benefit students' learning. For example:

- On an October morning at Southern Middle School, small groups of students in Amy Robertson's combined seventh/eighth grade integrated language arts class are busily involved in their "group read." After a break, Robertson reviews with them the standards for the writing assignment related to their reading. "What are the criteria for distinguished writing?" she asks. Her students' hands are in the air. Referring to "rubrics" and "metacognition," they discuss how they are producing "proficient" pieces of writing in terms of voice, purpose, details, organization, audience, wording, and appearance.

- At Iroquois Middle School, teacher Dina Kent has teamed with Cheri Lineweaver to create an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum on pre-historic life. Today Kent is dressed in a judge's robe to role play, along with teams of students, scenes depicting narrative and moral tensions in John Christopher's Dom and Va, the historical novel they have all read. "I prefer this kind of activity to a book report," Kent explains. "We discuss what makes for a good argument, and the kids develop their own scoring rubric. This means they have ownership, and they think it must be easy because

they thought it up, but it's actually much harder." Kent's students have carefully crafted their skits to meet the standards of learning they have defined. Following each skit, Kent as "judge" poses a set of thinking questions to the young actors. "What if...?" and "What is the evidence you have for...?" she asks.

- At Western Middle School, librarian Linda Young stays on through the late afternoon hours working on a proposal to establish a collegial support group among Western's eight social studies teachers to help them move toward resource-based instruction. "To become an independent learner, the textbook should be only enough to whet your appetite," she explains. "Eventually kids may not have a textbook at all." Young's plans for at least four three-hour workshops, each to take place at a media center, museum, or neighborhood library, reflect her commitment to showing teachers how they can move away from standardized learning materials to a wide variety of sources so that students' projects result in written or artistic exhibitions, video or audio tapes, or computer-generated products. Young elaborates further: "Kids and teachers need to know about all the resources that can help them learn, help them survive later on in life in finding and using information."

- "I *have* to tell you about this school," a Louisville eighth grader presses on a visitor. "I came here from Maryland, and this school is *so* different from the one I went to. Teachers really support you here. They make sure you learn. I'm on the newspaper here..." ("And Cindy's going to be the first woman President," interrupts her friend.) "...but if I'd stayed in Maryland, they were going to hold me back because my parents were getting a divorce, and I couldn't concentrate. This school has saved me."

Moments like these are occurring more frequently in these three middle schools as a result, to a great extent, of their participation in the Jefferson County

Public Schools (JCPS) High[5] Project for effecting middle school reform. The Project began in 1989, following a $10,000 planning grant and a national grants competition, with a larger grant to Jefferson County Public Schools from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The school system proposed to develop and provide an education of "high expectations, high content, and high support" for low-income students in the middle grades. Since then, the Project has tailored a variety of activities to the Foundation's four objectives for middle grades students:

- All students will complete the middle grades on time;
- All students will exhibit mastery of higher-order reasoning, thinking, and comprehension skills;
- All students will exhibit improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward school and schoolwork, as a result of regularly engaging in supportive interactions with adults; and
- All students will understand how different curricula can affect their career and/or post-secondary education options, and select programs of study that will enable them to pursue their choices.

Between 1989 and 1993, with $820,000 in funding from the Foundation, this Project has pursued a purposeful strategy for meeting these objectives in three Louisville middle schools. With two additional "highs" - "high energy" and "high involvement" - rounding out the Foundation's three, the Project's High[5] logo serves as a symbolic catch-phrase with implications for practical steps to bring about reform.

The Context for Middle School Reform in Jefferson County

Louisville's High[5] Project has taken shape in a school district where several change strategies devised in the name of middle school reform have been in place since the mid-1970's. These efforts include measures taken toward middle school restructuring in the district since 1975; an infrastructure that pays nominal respect to the need for teachers' sustained professional growth; and mandates for statewide education reform embodied in the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. Inevitably the High[5] Project responds to the history and conditions represented by these factors. At the same time, the Project has gone beyond this context to take its three middle schools on an accelerated journey towards reform.

- Middle School "Restructuring" in Jefferson County

Prior to the initiation of the High[5] Project, a 1975 court desegregation order occasioned both the merger of Louisville Public Schools with Jefferson County schools and the birth of middle schools, including magnet schools. According to longtime observers, many of these schools initially looked little different from the old junior highs. However, during the subsequent decade, educators in several of the schools began to implement practices that both distinguish middle schools from junior high schools and are associated with "true" middle schools, including common planning time for interdisciplinary teams of teachers, flexible scheduling, and teacher-based advisories. These efforts were so effective in one newly-created school, Noe Middle School, that Joan Lipsitz, then the director of

North Carolina's Center for Early Adolescence, profiled the school in her portraits of "successful schools for young adolescents."[1]

By the end of the 1980's, several district administrators had spearheaded change in some of the district's forward-looking schools, were so confident about the momentum toward middle school transformation across the district that they mobilized a wider circle of educators around the goal of bringing the Annual Conference of the National Middle School Association (NMSA) to Louisville in 1991. During what Barber describes as a "high period of great growth" during those years, the district's professional development arm, Gheens Professional Development Academy, brought in nationally-known experts in restructuring the middle grades to introduce all schools to middle school concepts. As an aid to making the transition to middle school structures, many schools implemented the Middle Grades Assessment Program, a school-based planning tool designed by the Center for Early Adolescence, and some became Professional Development Schools allied with the University of Louisville. By the time the district had begun the High[5] Project, then, most middle schools had at least baseline understanding of what a restructured middle school looked like and most had put into place particular structures that could allow them to pursue deeper reforms.

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[1]To be considered "successful," schools had to enroll students' with mean scores on standardized tests at average or above-average levels compared to their district counterparts. Schools also had to have solid attendance and student behavioral profiles, high levels of parent satisfaction, and a reputation for excellence. See Joan Lipsitz, Successful Schools for Young Adolescents, New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Books, 1984.

- A Districtwide Orientation to Professional Development

The availability of professional development opportunities for all teachers at all levels throughout the district offered a second reference point for middle school reform. Since 1983, the district has institutionalized its support for professional development through the establishment of the Gheens Professional Development Academy. Funded with an initial grant of $400,000 from Louisville's Gheens Foundation, the Academy's current budget now totals $10 million, exclusive of federal funding, most of which comes from the school district budget.[2]

By the time the High[5] Project was in the planning stages, then, professional development already had a formal place within the JCPS bureaucracy as a tool for school restructuring, including in the middle grades. Indeed, according to a report prepared by consultant Regina Kyle for the Gheens Foundation, middle schools that had sustained involvement with the Academy were more likely to show improvement in achievement and student "involvement" indicators (attendance, suspension, and grade retention rates) than

[2]Currently, Gheens offers a range of programs to facilitate "both systemic innovation and continuing incremental improvement." These programs include a professional library, curriculum resource centers, technical assistance for school restructuring, and coalitions of schools affiliated with national educational reform movements like the Coalition of Essential Schools and the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST). Gheens' 152-page catalog clusters the mostly short-term, three-, six-, or twelve-hour workshops into seven "strands." Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990, School-Based Decision-making, Performance Assessment, Primary School, Research-Based Instruction, Instructional Technology, and Cultural Diversity. Jefferson County teachers form a ready-made constituency for these workshops. According to district policy, Louisville teachers are paid to work 185 days, with four of those days designated for staff development. Of the 24 hours constituting those four days, teachers select 18 hours of training from the Gheens catalog.

those that moved from one short-term project to another. Yet not all middle schools fell within this group of schools, and some clearly remained outside of the spotlight of change activity.

- The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990

Any school change initiative to strengthen learning for all students undertaken anywhere in Kentucky in the 1990's has on its side the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). Passed by the legislature in response to the 1989 Kentucky Supreme Court's judgment that the state's system of common schools was unconstitutional, KERA established that all Kentucky's children are entitled to an "adequate education" defined as one that develops all students' capacities and abilities to:

1. Use basic communication and math skills for situations they will encounter throughout their lives;

2. Apply principles from math, sciences, arts, humanities, social studies, and practical living studies to situations they will encounter throughout their lives;

3. Become self-sufficient individuals;

4. Become responsible members of a family, work group, or community;

5. Think and solve problems in school situations and in life; connect and integrate experiences and new knowledge with what they have previously learned; and build on past learning experiences to acquire new information through various sources.

From the community perspective, Deb Miller, legislative monitor for Kentucky Youth Advocates, emphasizes, "What we finally have is public recognition that Kentucky's children

can achieve at levels equivalent to any of the nation's children." Jim Parks of the Kentucky Department of Education adds that KERA's thesis is not only that "all children can learn at high levels" but also that "all schools can improve." A strong accountability system built into KERA provides for the annual assessment of students in grades four, eight, and twelve, with results serving as the basis for determining schools' progress in meeting these goals. In each subject at each of these three grade levels, new assessments, including portfolios, define students' performance according to "rubrics," scoring grids that guide teachers in assessing what students know and can do in a given subject in terms of "novice," "apprentice," "proficient," and "distinguished" levels of achievement.

Over time, Kentucky expects schools to show greater proportions of students moving out of the "novice" and "apprentice" categories and into the "proficient" and "distinguished" categories in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The state also assesses schools' improvement in attendance, grade retention, and dropout rates. Schools that do not show improvement in achievement and other indicators are required to develop improvement plans and work with "distinguished educators" to implement that plan. In extreme cases, schools that fail to improve must relinquish power over personnel decisions to outside educators and allow students to transfer to other schools.

The passage of KERA leaves the middle schools of Jefferson County with no excuse for the low performance of any child, no matter how disadvantaged. The major policy shift embodied in this legislation provides even the poorest schools with incentives for reform. Although the High[5] Project was already underway by 1990, KERA provided a springboard

for school change efforts that essentially redirected school reform away from simple "restructuring" towards increasing student achievement. Within the High[5] schools, then, KERA offered further justification for an explicit focus on changes in classroom teaching and learning. Furthermore, whereas no single aspect of the wider Jefferson County context prior to KERA had seemed to be adequate impetus to introduce reforms in teaching and learning in the poorest schools, KERA insisted that no school was exempt from higher expectations. This shift had significant implications for the High[5] Project.

Closing the Gaps: Shifting Attention to Neglected Schools

Despite circumstances favorable to reform, middle schools in Jefferson County improved unevenly, and through the 1970's and 1980's some schools remained missing from the honor roll of successful schools for young adolescents. In some cases, school success was a function of the benefits that accrued to "traditional" or magnet schools that tended to attract some of the most advantaged students away from the majority of schools. In others, a few "charismatic" leaders maintained a kind of "bureaucracy-free zone" around their schools, creating the impression among educators and the public that reforms could take hold in particular schools but were not viable in all. According to one educator, regulations pertaining to state-mandated standardized tests, the state's "time-on-task" calendar, and the low status of middle schools relative to the district's elementary and high schools also contributed to archaic curriculum, scheduling practices and unequal distribution of resources within the district.

However, perhaps the most important barrier to widespread middle school reform was what one longtime observer calls an "unintentional conspiracy" to use the "ugly sisters" in Jefferson County's middle school family as repositories for employees of questionable reputation. As this observer explains:

> In any school system, there is a need to "do something" with problem employees, so you assign them to the disenfranchised schools. This means people look at new arrivals and ask "How did *you* screw up?" It's assumed that if you hadn't screwed up, you wouldn't be here. That also means principals have to make deals. Principals in schools for disadvantaged youth already have to be more assertive. When parents aren't watch dogs, principals have to do it. So principals have to go along with some things to get other things done.

Under such circumstances, restructuring activities can progress only to a limited point. Unequal expectations for improvement in teaching and learning virtually institutionalized unequal outcomes. Students in those undervalued schools, no matter how hard they worked, were certain of being left behind.

- Pre-Intervention Status of The High Schools

Among Louisville's students at risk of educational neglect were those at Iroquois, Southern, and Western Middle Schools. Situated miles from one another in different parts of the county, these schools nevertheless shared several characteristics. In a district where 46% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, upwards of three-quarters of the 850 to 900 students in these schools were poor enough to qualify. Within a district that is 69% white and 31% African American, two of the three enrolled nearly 40% African American students. In one school, 19% of all students were retained in grade every year.

suggesting the extent to which failure had become the norm for the young adolescent students there, and to a lesser extent in the other two schools. By eighth grade, large numbers of students in the three schools were overage for grade, and consequently at risk for dropping out by the time they entered high school.

According to many observers, the schools also shared a reputation for a school climate defined less by the goal of educating students than containing them. Suspension rates ranging from 16.7 to 32.8 for the 1988-89 school year indicated an inattention to school discipline that took a toll on students and teachers alike. Recalling conditions in the schools before 1989, one school reform advocate remembers watching a fight between students develop in the front hallway of one school, with adults from the building observing but failing to intervene. In another school, a teacher remembers:

> Six years ago, we had a principal who never left the first floor. We had the highest rate of teacher assaults in the district. You'd close your door and hope for the best. I wanted out. I wanted to teach high school.

At the same time, many teachers in these schools suffered knowing that many assumed that they were working in these schools because they had failed elsewhere, even when this was not the case. As a teacher who joined one of the schools from a private school says:

> Everyone asked why I would want to go work in this school. I have a doctorate. I could have worked anywhere, but I knew this was where I was needed most.

Finally, many educators in these schools had limited confidence in their capacity for teaching all students. In one school, for example, a survey conducted during 1988-89 found that only 55% of the teachers responded "yes" to the statement "Teachers in this school feel they can make a difference," and only 54% agreed that "Faculty and staff have high expectations for all students." Most troubling of all, only one out of eight teachers responded "Yes" to the statement "All students are capable of learning." Clearly, such beliefs represented a barrier to mobilizing available resources on behalf of high achievement for all students.

- Achievement as the Central Purpose of Middle School Reform

In implementing the High[5] Project, Jefferson County staff were fortunate to be operating in a climate that invited new initiatives. However, the County's standard approaches to middle school restructuring and professional development, while helpful, seemed insufficient to the task of transforming the High[5] schools after years of neglect. Despite the introduction of new organizational structures to JCPS middle schools, no one had defined the purpose of these changes in terms of producing student achievement gains. As Ron Barber, former principal of Western Middle School, notes:

> We can move structures, but if all you do is go to teams and don't change the quality of work teachers are giving kids, you are missing a big part of reform. We are trying to work on what happens when teachers close their doors... The reason you do this is to change the classroom. It's a big shift, but reform, if you're only going to move structures, is like rearranging the chairs.... What the High[5] partnership with the Foundation injected was the idea that we were after not just middle schools, but middle school *reform*.

Likewise, short-term in-service training had failed to produce desired academic gains, and although some teachers enjoyed individual staff development workshops, they did not necessarily apply strategies from in-service sessions in their classrooms. As one teacher explained:

> Individual workshops for one teacher can be very good, but the "bullet" just isn't there unless everyone does it. Unless that happens, you don't see major change.

Indeed, research suggests that approaches that define teachers as individual consumers in a marketplace of workshops do not yield lasting change in school or student performance. For example, noting that most school districts "leave professional development to chance or to individual preferences," Joyce Epstein and her colleagues (1991) warn:

> Most teachers who have been "in-serviced" in workshops, clinics, or short courses do not change their practices. They are not expected to do so, not rewarded for trying, and not guided in their efforts. If this pattern of staff development continues, there will be little notable improvement in the education of early adolescents (p. 40).

At the same time that the district's emphasis on restructuring and staff development offered a hospitable context for the High[5] efforts, the Project's particular concern with the academic achievement of disadvantaged youth required the High[5] schools to forge their own path toward reform. This core concern with student achievement has significantly shaped program development for the Project, resulting in a first wave of reform that is gradually advancing student learning and producing lasting changes in how teachers view themselves, their students, and their schools.

- Early Stages: Exploring Issues of Involvement, Expectations, and Support

As the Project took shape under the direction of Howard Hardin, JCPS Director of Assessment and Instructional Choices, the specific tactics of reform evolved to fit changing perceptions of the needs of the schools, students, and teachers most engaged in change. Hardin did not have a foolproof recipe for middle school transformation, but he was certain that if authentic reform was going to take hold it would have to involve teachers in a variety of roles. He also knew that teachers would have to expand their pedagogical repertoire to create classrooms where teaching and learning could compete for the attention of young adolescents against a compelling peer culture and demanding social circumstances. With these thoughts in mind, and in keeping with the five "highs," Hardin began to work with teachers in three of the district's poorest middle schools to shape an initiative for change. This initiative would, eventually, have a dual focus on professional development and curricular reform directed toward improvement in student achievement.

To institutionalize "high involvement" and to draw out the best ideas available from school-based staff, Hardin first convened a High[5] Planning and Implementation (P & I) committee consisting of two teachers and the principal from each of the three participating schools to meet on a regular basis to think and plan for school-based change. As Hardin notes:

> When you pull teachers together and get them talking, you find they are hungry for new skills and knowledge. They want to learn, and they will tell you what they need to learn.

Neither the teachers nor Hardin understood at that point what teacher-based planning would require. One teacher who has served on the planning group over the Project's five-year lifespan explains:

> I volunteered for P & I because I wanted to be in a fishbowl, but I didn't really realize what I bit off to chew. I don't think people knew what to expect. We had no idea the commitment we were making.

With teachers uncertain about what approach to take in realizing "middle school reform," another P & I member recalls:

> At first, we didn't know what we were getting into. We were just told to "dream a little," so we started out brainstorming everything we could think of that we needed and wanted for our kids. But there were problems. Sometimes we'd run up against contract considerations. Or we'd say we wanted to fix up the school or have smaller classes, but the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation said we couldn't buy equipment or hire extra staff.

Given these parameters, the committee and individual schools proceeded to explore the meaning of the five "highs" for the schools. With "high energy" as the watchword, the schools began the reform task by establishing a variety of "high support" programs, especially for students most prone to failure. At Iroquois, teachers offered a summer camp for sixth graders to develop problem-solving skills and self-esteem. They also recruited students onto a "Catch-Up Crew" to allow those who were overage for their grade to catch up with their peers by performing to standards spelled out in individual contracts. At Southern, teachers embraced the Excel Program, which granted mid-year promotions to students behind in grade placement, and implemented an extended-year program for students at risk of non-

promotion. Western focused on the most vulnerable students by implementing the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) program as a major compensatory approach, but also moved to initiate a schoolwide Chapter 1 program, hiring a science resource teacher to infuse science into the school's curriculum and purchasing laptop computers for use by students and parents at home.

Complementing these activities for students were new opportunities for professional development, many offered during the school day. A number of math teachers signed up for training to implement the Algebra Project, a curriculum project that introduces algebraic concepts to sixth graders in the context of concrete situations. Others joined the Foxfire teacher network at the University of Louisville. Still others enrolled in programs designed to build skills in Socratic dialogue, writing across the curriculum, cooperative learning, and cooperative discipline. Some of these activities connected students to other efforts, for example, as when students brought skills developed through Children's Express to the Books Behind Bars program.

The Project not only introduced opportunities funded solely through the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation grant to the schools; it also linked the schools to locally-funded programs and business partnerships that complemented the High[5] objectives. As the Project brokered arrangements that exposed many students to new opportunities for support and teachers to new resources and strategies, school-based staff were swept up in a whirlwind of activity that brought both excitement and distraction. Recalls one teacher, a member of the planning group:

> The Project looked like a smorgasbord. We had so many people trying so many different things that it was difficult to get feedback on what was most important and most effective.

In fact, once the Project was well underway, some participants began to realize that "add-on" enrichment and mentoring activities would go only so far. As one teacher notes, "Every student needs a mentor, and there are never enough." At the same time, as helpful as such resources might be to individual students, they did not address the imperative for systemic change or teachers' immediate needs for new day-to-day classroom strategies to cope with the learning needs of all their students. As one teacher remembers:

> We knew we needed help. The year I came in as a first year teacher, there were other teachers and they were floundering. At first, I was trying to hide because I didn't want anyone to see any weaknesses. Gradually I realized others were floundering and I had company.

Still, not all teachers in the High[5] schools welcomed the thought of more in-service training, at least as they had known it. Night workshops did not fit their exhausting schedules, and many had developed the feeling that they had "heard it all before." As one teacher remembers:

> Most of the professional development we'd had just reinforced traditional methodologies. There were very few new initiatives other than computers or software. It was all teacher-centered. We got to the point that we recognized rewarmed soup - the same old thing introduced in a different way - and we wanted something totally different.

Lacking faith in themselves or "the system" that was supposed to support them, teachers often turned to blaming students and their circumstances for students' poor

academic performance had come to mask a deep sense of hopelessness about reaching the most disadvantaged students. Howard Hardin explains:

> When we first became involved in the Edna McConnell Clark project, I went to the three schools and explained that we had identified these schools because they served large numbers of disadvantaged students. I explained that we wanted to ask them what the problems were. Without exception, they said, "It's the kids. These kids don't care. They don't value education." We asked why they thought kids did not value education. They said, "It's their parents. We're knocking ourselves out, but we can't do anything because the parents don't support us."
>
> And they were knocking themselves out. They were working hard to control the kids....
>
> I said, "Let's ask the parents whether they care." And it turned out the parents all wanted the children to excel in school. But when we surveyed the teachers, only 25% said they "agreed" or "somewhat agreed" that their students could learn at grade level.

Recognizing that earlier district efforts had been inadequate to boost teachers' confidence in themselves and their students, some on the planning group guessed that programs from outside the district might have a better chance of appealing to discouraged teachers. And, in fact, a "menu" of resources available to the High[5] Project did, upon examination, include substantially different fare. In addition to its grant to the district, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation had also funded a variety of national projects to enhance district efforts. For example, the Center for Early Adolescence and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education had received Foundation support to provide technical assistance to the schools. Others - including the Council for Basic Education's Writing to Learn program, the Algebra Project, the Junior Great Books Program, Higher Order

Thinking Skills (HOTS) Project, and Children's Express - focused on curriculum development and reform that fit the Project's commitment to "high content." During the first year of the grant, representatives of these programs and organizations had visited the schools explaining how they might support the High[5] Project and offering what seemed like a windfall of opportunities. As Joyce Paul, JCPS Director of Special Projects explains:

> This wasn't just a grant. It was a gateway to resources that we were totally unaware of. When we said we were thinking of doing something, the Foundation responded to us by putting us in touch with new resources. They say, "Here's an opportunity; if you think it's interesting, go ahead."

Yet, in the early stages, the windfall sometimes felt like an avalanche, and perhaps not surprisingly, many High[5] participants, including teachers, principals, and Central Office staff, felt overwhelmed with the choices available to them. From the principals' perspective, the wide array of possibilities presented administrative problems, including that of arranging for and supervising substitutes when teachers left for professional development. For example, one principal notes:

> We were bombarded the first year with wonderful experiences so that we were worn out but excited at the same time. The training connected the faculty to a great degree in a common, unified effort. They had opportunities they would not have received otherwise, but it cost us a lot of meetings and a lot of time.

The issue of time away from the classroom was also of concern to teachers, and one teacher reports, "After that first year, with so much training and so many subs, we wanted to be spending our time with our kids." Even Central Office leadership spent the first year

groping to develop the knowledge necessary to make the best decisions for the Project. As Joyce Paul explains:

> The first year of the process, it was so difficult. We didn't know what we needed or wanted. We sampled everything. Once we got beyond that point, we knew enough to make informed decisions. We felt more confident in our own decision-making. We felt we could say "no" to some opportunities, that we wouldn't get what we wanted out of them.

Despite what many remember as months of confusion, the three schools persisted in pursuing the five "highs," with some early evidence of success. Whereas 209 students from all three schools had been retained in grade in 1988-89, only 93 students were not promoted in June 1990, and of these, 62 successfully completed an extended school year program to win promotion. In addition, another 100 overage students who had received peer tutoring had gained the necessary skills for mid-year promotion. On standardized tests, an additional 125 students registered scores above the 50th percentile after the Project's first year of implementation. Finally, on a School Attitude Measure, students expressed increased willingness to take responsibility for grades and promotion.

- Discovering the Power of Professional Development: High Expectations, High Content, High Support for Teachers

At the early stages of the High[5] Project, few of those involved fully understood the exact direction the project would ultimately take. Increasingly, however, the High[5] Planning and Implementation teacher team along with Howard Hardin and Joyce Paul began to understand that if they were to see meaningful results, they would need to focus resources more directly and more strategically. As one of the planning team members explains:

> When you have such a large variety of resources, you get a scattershot effect. We decided the best thing would be to focus, zero in on a few things that we could get everyone to look at, say Writing to Learn. You can assess those few things, evaluate them. Once you understand what works, you can add on.

At the school level, teachers and principals had also come to this conclusion, and at Iroquois, staff decided to prepare a report on their own assessment of Writing to Learn. Writing to Learn is a professional development program sponsored by the Council for Basic Education in Washington, DC. Designed specifically for use with urban educators, the program focuses on developing students' thinking skills by using all forms of creative, expository, and didactic writing in all academic subject. Over a two-week period, teachers become writers themselves, read and professional literature, and learn to design and use tools such as scoring rubrics and portfolios.

Although Iroquois teachers who had trained in the program were enthusiastic about its value, the school as a whole needed to understand more about the program's impact on their students. Under the guidance of an assessment team consisting of a reading specialist and two regular classroom teachers, teachers experienced in Writing to Learn and their students observed classrooms, interviewed teachers, conducted surveys of 180 students, and completed questionnaires. The teachers also compared scores of writing portfolios of eighth graders from Writing to Learn classrooms with those of other eighth graders.

Reporting its findings, the team noted that students were responding well to writing assignments in subjects like math, even when the teacher was not routinely applying Writing to Learn strategies. The team also made recommendations for texts teachers could read

aloud to demonstrate variety in writing styles. As an assessment directed by and for teachers, the recommendations were taken seriously without objection, and the school now had better information about how teachers might implement Writing to Learn to bring about improved student achievement. Moreover, their efforts reaped tangible rewards: In 1992, KERA scores for writing portfolios of Iroquois eighth graders improved dramatically, with the number at the apprentice (middle) level increasing by more than 100%.

At both the school and district level, then, teachers gradually came to a consensus that the Project needed a more pointed focus on fostering achievement through professional development. With this focus, school-based teams began to encourage as many teachers as possible to develop skills in a few strategies like cooperative learning and cooperative discipline to bring consistency to classroom norms and interactions. Gradually schools settled on a few favored approaches - Socratic Seminars, Writing to Learn, EPIC, and Children's Express among them - that a core group of teachers had found successful and wanted to expand. By this time, too, teachers like Burt Plumb, trained through the High[5] Project in Socratic Seminars, were prepared to lead colleagues in developing new skills for improved learning.

Moreover, with the coming of KERA, statewide education reform had provided even stronger justification for the Project's focus on academic achievement. But if KERA helped focus on "the problem," it provided only an incomplete solution. In particular, as Howard Hardin notes, "KERA doesn't offer much in the way of professional development." Indeed, in the pages of provisions mandated by the Act, including required training for

superintendents and principals, KERA calls only for five additional days in the area of teacher training and that each district appoint a staff person to coordinate professional development with other districts.

The district's planners decided that the Project should focus even more intensively on professional development than had been standard operating procedure in Jefferson County. First, High's professional development would be tied to two main premises of school reform:

- Middle school reform would mean little if it did not change the teaching and learning that occurs daily in each classroom.
- Middle school reform would mean little if it did not strengthen each school's capacity to mobilize all resources so that high-powered curriculum and instruction routinely becomes the foundation for learning.

Second, recognizing that higher expectations for student outcomes warranted more powerful approaches to staff development, the Project would promote models that encouraged school-based teams of teachers to investigate issues of importance to them. Such an approach was predicated on several assumptions:

1. Teachers work best on problems they have identified for themselves.
2. Teachers become effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and consider ways of working differently.
3. Teachers help each other by working collaboratively.
4. Working with colleagues helps teachers in their professional development.

In short, professional development would be a means to strengthen school performances overall rather than simply to "develop" individual teachers. As Epstein and her colleagues (1991) note:

> [Staff development] refers to the *development of the staff as a staff and the development of a positive school climate*....[and] should give teachers *time and support to become experts* (e.g. to be more proficient scientists, mathematicians, writers, artists, etc.) and to work together as colleagues to select, adapt, or design new programs and processes for their own schools and classrooms (p. 40).

Ultimately, according to Epstein and her colleagues,

> Most staff development falls short for large numbers of teachers mainly because it is not designed to help teachers feel more professional, work together with other teachers, or improve individual skills. And most staff development pays little attention to the ultimate impact of the staff development activities on student skills, attitudes and successes (p. 37).

Such assessments suggested that professional development for the High schools should depart from both national and local custom. To underscore the Project's commitment to professional growth as a means for reform, Hardin and his team made the explicit decision to invest heavily in the people who could implement change. The allocation of 59% of the $210,000 Foundation grant for 1991-92 toward professional development reflected this commitment. Staff development now accounts for three-quarters of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation grant.

- Features of High[5] Professional Development

With middle school reform defined in terms of improved teaching and learning, High[5] Director Hardin also determined that among the Project's activities, professional growth opportunities should provide teachers with powerful pedagogical tools commensurate with the task of teaching some of the district's most disadvantaged students. Thus:

- Instead of being developed from "the top," High[5] professional development would be designed by and for teams of teachers from each school.

- Instead of focusing on organizational processes and structures, High[5] professional development would focus on student achievement and teaching higher order skills within content areas.

- Instead of offering short-term workshops, High[5] professional development would be long-term, offering teachers up to 30 hours of training in summer institutes and semester-long courses, with school-based follow-up also available.

- Instead of leaving choices for professional development to individual teachers, High[5] professional development would address the needs of teams of teachers from each school so that new learning could be sustained by teachers meeting collegially at each school and across schools.

In short, the Project was reaching an understanding that change in the most disadvantaged schools required a major investment in the teachers responsible for implementing classroom changes that could improve student performance. Taken together, these features communicated a significantly different message from that of a more traditional cafeteria approach to professional development. Expectations were changing, not only for student performance, but for teacher performance. Teachers would have access to expanded

opportunities to broaden their roles and sharpen their skills. In turn, they would grow as professionals in a professional community of learners.

- Applying Early Lessons to Intensive Professional Development: A Summer Institute for Teaching Integrated Language Arts

After three years, The High[5] Project staff and teachers had enough evidence to assert that intensive, school-based professional development had to take place in a setting where teachers were undistracted by daily obligations. Teachers needed extra time to observe new pedagogical approaches, reflect on current research, and develop classroom strategies that they could claim as their own. Based on their High[5] experiences, they had also come to understand that meaningful professional growth also required on-going support for teachers once they returned to their classrooms.

The decision to apply these lessons to a summer teacher institute in Integrated Language Arts evolved from both prior experience and the Project's focus on academic achievement. Teachers' own enthusiasm for and confidence in the Writing to Learn model suggested guidelines for further professional development. Moreover, with school-focused KERA results suggesting that "kids were not reading and writing enough," planners decided to focus specifically on language arts. Thus, at the November 1992 conference of the National Middle School Association, Hardin and the principals met with Beverly Bimes-Michalak, Writing to Learn's director and a former National Teacher of the Year. Together they fashioned plans for a summer institute during which teams of eighth grade teachers would explore research related to language arts development and design strategies that

would include whole language learning in settings that integrated Chapter 1 and special education students into "regular" classes.

First, the planning group established expectations for the kinds of school and district supports needed to ensure the program's success. As Bimes-Michalak explains:

> I had observed that reading in the schools was separate from language arts, so we agreed that Integrated Language Arts would be taught in a two-period block of time. We also called together teacher representatives from each school and talked about the materials we would need for thematic units, scheduling, and the expectation that all teachers would be trained in an inclusion model.

Because Bimes-Michalak insisted on conducting the program with "an equal partner" from the district office, Hardin invited Carol Hall, Jefferson County's K-12 Reading Specialist, to join the program as co-facilitator. As former co-director of the University of Louisville's Writing Project, Hall's commitment to offering teachers experiences through which they would renew their love of learning was ideally suited to this partnership. She explains:

> I knew that in Louisville's restructuring schools, people hadn't been supported in their content as they should have. The way you learn to teach writing is to learn to write better yourself. This doesn't happen in a one-shot kind of project. Our intent was to provide the best instructional program for our teachers and to promote the expectations that the best was the best for all.

At a meeting prior to the summer of 1993, the two planned the new venture. Says Bimes-Michalak:

> We decided we wanted to awaken the teachers to the passion of being readers and writers, to get them talking about reading and writing. Then we would work with them to plan how they could carry the excitement of reading and writing into their language arts and social studies classrooms.

The approach Bimes-Michalak and Hall adopted closely followed the successful Writing to Learn model. Twenty-four teachers - eight from each school - would meet six hours each day for ten days during the summer, to be followed by one after-school workshop during the fall and individual classroom observations by the trainers. Because of their KERA-mandated responsibilities to maintain student portfolios, eighth grade teachers with "regular," special education, and Chapter 1 backgrounds would receive priority for places in the program, with others involved on a first-come, first-served basis. Teachers would receive stipends for their time beyond the hours required for staff development.

The first week would focus on "creating a community of teachers who have discovered the joy of reading and writing themselves." Each day would include an initial conversation about the teachers' common reading with attention to how teachers might replicate such conversations in their own classrooms. Because teachers need time and a conceptual framework for reflecting on their daily practice, Bimes-Michalak and Hall also included a daily segment on up-to-date research. They focused on research that supported learning strategies of whole-class conversation and Socratic dialogue, small group discussions, individual choices of reading to develop learners' own preferences, reciprocal teaching, and integrated writing and reading. To reinforce research and expand teachers' professional

knowledge base, the institute provided each teacher with Linda Rieff's Seeking Diversity. As Carol Hall explains:

> We wanted to expand teachers' professional reading - through Linda Rieff's book and professional journal articles - and get teachers to think about their reactions. That's just what we got! We got everything from, "Gee, I could use that" to "Gee, I'm not so sure about that." You get a lot of good discussion with a range of perspectives.

To reduce teachers' reluctance to examine their own writing styles, the facilitators modeled their own writing process during the training. As Bimes-Michalak explains, "At first, some teachers say, 'I will not read and write with my students.' You have to allow a lot of time for discussion to deal with resistance." Thus, during the 1993 summer institute, Bimes-Michalak and Hall invited teachers to "get into" discussion of literature by writing about personal memories triggered by scenes from the novel they were all reading. After a half hour, Bimes-Michalak had several false starts, and she proceeded to describe her difficulties in putting ideas on paper in terms of the stages of the writing process. Gradually, participants joined in to create what the facilitators describe as "a series of teachable moments" and a demonstration for teachers of the ways one topic can trigger diverse responses, each with its own subtleties.

During the second week of the institute, Bimes-Michalak and Hall moved on to work with these same teachers to develop thematic units for use in their classrooms the following year. As Hall explains:

> We followed what we know are the characteristics of good professional development. It must be long-term, and it must be particularly focused on instruction in the classroom.

Prior to the institute, teachers had chosen "Coming of Age," "Learning from the Past," and "Facing Diversity" as their three organizing themes. Such themes not only focus learning around one concept in depth, they also offer students opportunities to connect their school learning with issues in their own lives. "We want kids to feel that learning has a purpose," explains Bimes-Michalak. "This has to be why we're doing this." Using these themes as a framework, teams of teachers from each school worked together to write curriculum and design activities that both related to each topic and incorporated professional insights developed during the Institute's first week. Teachers also designed rubrics to identify criteria for student evaluation, a tool in keeping with the expectations of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. At the end of two weeks, teachers had produced enough activities to fill a spiral-bound guide to thematically-oriented activities, including activities that would allow for "group reads" and encourage individual students to read constantly in up to eight books on the same theme. Teachers also spent part of their time identifying theme-based questions that could frame intellectual issues for their students and sharpen dialogue to foster improved learning in each classrooms.

Momentum for change did not stop at the end of the summer period. To ensure that teachers were actually using the activities developed during the Institute, Bimes-Michalak returned to Louisville in September for the first of four follow-up sessions, meeting with all teacher participants in a group. She also observed and met with teachers individually to

provide feedback on specific lessons. These opportunities, while expensive, are key to monitoring progress, giving teachers confidence, and providing feedback to each school's leadership team regarding school-specific structures and routines - including the school's schedule or grouping practices - that might undermine learning. As Bimes-Michalak writes (1990):

> It is difficult for teachers to improve in isolation. They need a supportive network, where they receive lots of guided practice and coaching over an extended period of time. Lasting effects will only occur when those responsible for professional development roll up their sleeves and join the teachers in their classrooms, helping them to process their successes and their failures. Only by team-teaching classes, by observing, and by giving demonstrations, can professional trainers improve the quality of instruction (p. 9).

The Integrated Language Arts Summer Institute is the most recent example of how High[5] professional development leverages meaningful change in teaching and learning. Halfway into the year, teacher participants have begun to apply new approaches in their eighth grade language arts classes in all three schools. During the fall, classrooms buzzed with discussion of new novels, and in one school, students voluntarily clustered around the library computer during their lunch period, investigating the ways in which the school's new CD-ROM could help them explore further the theme of "Facing Diversity." New strategies were already producing results in terms of teachers' sense of improved efficacy and student motivation. Summing up the feelings of many, Iroquois librarian Judy Morey says:

> This is the most exciting thing I've done in education. I just really appreciate that someone cared about us enough to spend money on us, paying us to come, and buying us great books.

> Finally someone gave us professional background. That's why I'm so committed to making this work....
>
> I passed up a free trip to Florida to come to the summer institute, and I don't regret it one ounce. It was the best thought-out, the best organized training I've ever had. It's an idea I'd thought of for years. It made sense, but you can't do it alone, think up all the themes, do multicultural explorations....
>
> I honestly think we can match East End schools with this Integrated Language Arts approach. I say this to teachers I know from other schools, and they say, "Oh, sure, you?" But they don't know how hard we're working. And the kids are working hard too.

The Road to Reform: Changing Teaching and Learning in the High[5] Schools

As 1994 begins, change is surfacing in a variety of ways in all three of the High[5] schools, much of it attributable to the Project's professional development strategy. Change is most evident in teachers' expectations for students and in classroom instruction. In addition, as teachers formulate new roles for themselves and shape new school routines, the schools are becoming places where all organizational features support student success and teacher professionalism.

- Teacher Expectations

In many urban schools, teachers who have not had opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills that engage students in learning often attribute poor academic progress to students' parents or social circumstances as a way of coping with their own frustration and

hopelessness. The High[5] Project has addressed the problem of low expectations for student performance by strengthening teachers' classroom efficacy. As Howard Hardin explains:

> At first what we had was only a handful of teachers who believed their students could learn on grade level. We had to change that. How did we do that? We did that with training. We gave teachers the knowledge and skills they didn't have before and gave teachers strategies they could use to be successful with urban students.
>
> We had to change teachers' attitudes, that's true. But I'm firmly convinced that if you went out to change attitudes, you'd fail. We gave them strategies they could use to see success.

In Hardin's view, professional development to increase teachers' grasp of learning theory and engage teachers in designing and using challenging curriculum in their content areas would result in the higher expectations for student learning. This has been the case in the High[5] schools. According to a survey taken during the 1992-93 year, about 85% of teachers in all three schools now "agree" or "somewhat agree' that all students can learn. In one school, 97% now agree with that statement; and in that same school, 94% report that "teachers feel they make a difference" and that "faculty and staff have high expectations for all students," up from 55% and 54% in 1989.

In day to day terms, these changes mean that some of the attitudes toward students that surface in other JCPS middle schools are virtually absent from conversations among High[5] teachers. Hardin says, "I would hope that if someone blames the students in one of our schools now, someone else would confront him." In fact, although some teachers still express concern that their students may leave the elementary grades with weak skills,

blaming students' circumstances for poor academic performance is a rare activity in the High[5] schools. This is not to say that teachers are unaware of the personal and social challenges students face; rather they are not seen as insurmountable barriers to learning. Teacher Amy Robertson explains:

> This may sound cold when you consider what some of our kids have to face, but we have to focus on achievement. I say, "I know what you have to cope with at home. I know it's not so easy to forget all that. But this is what you have to do to learn."

Higher teacher expectations also translate into new norms, structures, and routines that reflect these expectations on a day to day basis. For example, some teachers are embracing high expectations for all students in multi-ability classrooms so that less confident students interact academically with their more successful peers. At Southern, one team combines on-grade eighth graders with seventh graders who did not meet standards for promotion the previous June but who do extra work in to catch up with their peers in their multi-grade classroom. At Iroquois, students with disabilities are now included in general education classes where "regular" and special education professionals teaching teach side by side share high expectations for all their students. As one teacher explains:

> Teachers have willingly accepted the exceptional child into their classroom, and because the teachers have higher expectations, these students are succeeding.

In fact, teachers now have not only a higher *level* of expectations for all children but also new *kinds* of expectations for more students. These new expectations, in turn, foster

a reconsideration of the kinds of activities that might enrich student learning. As one teacher notes:

> Before the High[5] Project, there would have been teachers who would have said, "These kids don't care about the arts." Well last year, a teacher brought in a video of the Louisville Ballet for the first time, and the kids loved it.

Another teacher explains:

> In the beginning of the grant... we discovered that most of the faculty did not think our students could learn. Now, not only do teachers think students can learn, but can do higher order thinking skills.

In practical terms, this new orientation has resulted in increasing numbers of students attending academic competitions like Odyssey of the Mind, Governor's Cup, Quick Recall-Problem Solving, and Math Bowl. Perhaps nowhere is this change more dramatically observed than at Western Middle School where low-income students are not only attending such competitions, they are excelling. For example, in 1990, science teacher Sandy Mayer and other volunteer teachers at Western began coaching a team of students for the Odyssey of the Mind competition. Three years later, the team placed first in the state in one of the problem-solving categories. As Mayer recalls:

> I was scared to death because I had never coached for Odyssey of the Mind before, but I though Western was the perfect place to do it. This is a competition that relies less on reading and more on creativity, and this is what our kids do well. So I started doing creative problem-solving in my class - things like "How is a tree similar to a cat?" and "How many ways can you use a worn out tennis shoe?" And I'd get them to think up captions for baby pictures. We started by doing team competitions within class. Now we've come close to winning [in

> all categories] at the state, but we haven't done it yet. It's just that I had not yet taught them the kind of problem you need experience on.

If the spirit of high expectations triggers students' wish to show other Louisville middle schools that even the most disadvantaged young adolescents in the district are up to serious academic challenges, it also stimulates teachers' desire to demonstrate to the public that all students can respond to improved learning opportunities. And despite KERA, this is still a difficult argument to make in Kentucky. As a September 1993 report to the Pritchard Committee and the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform has noted, most Kentuckians still remain skeptical that all students can learn at high levels. Yet even in the face of outmoded attitudes toward achievement in the broader community, many High[5] teachers notice that both the immediate community and their students are beginning to understand the message that low-income students can succeed. Says one teacher:

> High[5] has made us very visible in a positive way. Before the Clark grant the publicity about us was always negative. Now the Courier-Journal articles show us in a positive light, and the kids have a better image of the school and themselves.

Another teacher, noting that "teachers in this school truly do believe that all students can learn, and more of our students feel the same way," points to students' higher aspirations and a willingness to seek out tougher, but ultimately more rewarding, high school programs. From 1991 to 1992 the High[5] schools showed an increase in the percentage of students planning to enroll in challenging high school courses, growing from 43% to 60% at Iroquois, 43% to 46% at Southern, and 39% to 52% at Western.

Whether because of new expectations on the part of students, new beliefs on the part of teachers, or new structures and expanded opportunities that support learning, many teachers report observing concrete changes in students' learning. Says one teacher:

> I think the kids are better. The eighth graders seem more mature, and the kids are taking more ownership. I let the students do a lot more now. We're at a point where we think of students as workers.

Even one eighth grade teacher who participated in High[5] activities only to the required level notices a major change: "We used to have a lot of seventeen-year-olds in our classes," he notes. "That's not true any more. The kids seem more willing to learn now."

Yet others see the changes from a different perspective. As one teacher from Southern says:

> The kids are the same. We're different. This place is different. It's more exciting, interesting, safer, more stable, more professional.

And another from Western insists:

> The kids haven't gotten better. It's that we've found out that you can learn to teach in spite of all the difficulties we face. Now I have ideas and support. I can say to [my colleague], "What do I do?," and [she] can say, "Here are some options...."

Yet neither higher expectations or a more energized climate necessarily produce immediate change in every old habit. For example, a 1993 survey found that students at the schools average only 2.3 hours of homework weekly, suggesting that homework assignments for most students do not fully reflect expressed beliefs in the importance of challenging

students. At the same time, teachers' willingness to examine the amount of completed homework is evidence of a commitment to closing the gap between belief and behavior.

- Authentic Instruction and "High Content"

Central to the High[5] reform effort is a fundamental belief: Improved learning depends on teachers who are knowledgeable about academic content and able to employ a variety of teaching methodologies to help all students master that content. After five years of hard work, teaching in High[5] schools is clearly becoming more and more "authentic." According to Newmann and Wehlage (1993), "authentic instruction" meets standards in five areas: higher order thinking, depth of knowledge, connectedness to the world, substantive conversation, and social support for student achievement. In growing numbers of High[5] classrooms, rote learning is giving way to curriculum and instruction that weaves these standards together in a way that offers more meaningful school experiences to young adolescent students.

Thinking Skills As a Context for Learning Basic Skills — Much traditional teaching assumes that students must demonstrate complete mastery of "basic skills" before they can be exposed to higher order thinking. Over time, High[5] teachers have begun to reject this assumption as they have come to understand that students learn basic skills best in a context that calls on them to apply those skills in situations that have meaning in their world. As a result, many teachers feel increasingly able to abandon rigid textbook-based assignments for more experiential activities. And as teachers have learned to use a wider variety of

resources other then textbooks for their own and their students' learning, they increasingly articulate norms that value richer learning. Says one teacher:

> There's a good pressure on us now. Now I would be embarrassed to be a teacher who says, "Open your books to page 40." It's a stigma to do that here.

Consequently, in High[5] language arts classrooms, students now set goals for their own learning with the help of their teachers. Teachers review grammar, language usage, and punctuation in the contexts of reading and writing rather than as isolated "basic skills," and students keep writing folders, journals, and reading logbooks that provide avenues for them to reflect on their thinking process. Teachers also have changed and are writing with their students, sharing their writer's process, reading their pieces to students, and modeling revision.

A focus on higher order thinking also crops up in teachers' new understanding that students' rough spots in basic skills mastery should not bar them from participation in the demands of grappling with the universal concerns of the humanities. Burt Plumb, until recently a teacher at Southern Middle School, and others who have developed new skills in leading Socratic seminars increasingly engage students in extended dialogue for understanding based on close reading of challenging original source materials like Buddha's "Sermon," Machiavelli's The Prince, and the American Pledge of Allegiance. Such seminar texts challenge students to look for evidence that support different perspectives and complex points of view. In choosing texts for discussion, Plumb explains:

> I look for ambiguity, inconsistency, change of position in the texts I choose - texts that will provoke thought about something that's going on in current life.

Plumb, who developed his own skills in the use of Socratic seminars through High[5] professional development and is now an independent consultant training teachers in the Socratic process, reports that as teachers have come to understand that thinking is at the core of learning, they are increasingly selecting Socratic approaches for their classrooms. At Southern alone, 26 of 39 teachers trained in Socratic dialogue are utilizing the methodology on a regular basis to help students deepen learning. As Plumb explains:

> Thoughtfulness and reflection are not valued outcomes in today's world. If we buy into the idea that thoughtfulness can be taught, we will enhance everything else that is required of our students. You can't do a lot without thinking. I mean you can, but it's not worth much.

From Plumb's perspective, conversation about challenging text is what provokes thinking. He says, "You can see kids thinking. It's observable."

Higher order thinking is also evident in Chapter 1 HOTS classes in which students develop problem-solving skills through Socratic questioning in relation to computer games. Activities like Odyssey of the Mind and peer mediation programs also offer opportunities to practice skills in generalizing, applying knowledge to new situations, and problem-solving. For example, at Southern Middle School, teacher Anne Herbert trains student "conflict managers" to define a problem from several points of view, gather background facts, synthesize information, propose solutions, and prepare a written agreement. Following a

role play, students discuss their own contributions to the process and evaluate the final agreement.

Connecting School and "Real World" Learning Through Thematic Curriculum — As teachers in the High[5] schools have begun to organize content around themes, students increasingly have access to valued knowledge and opportunities to explore ideas in depth. For example, themes that teachers developed during the Integrated Language Arts summer institute lend themselves to multiple readings about particular historical events, and about topics of diversity and growing up. Thus, "Learning from the Past" invites students to study the Holocaust broadly through autobiography, historical fiction, poetry, and short stories rather than simply as one aspect of one historical period. As one teacher explains:

> Now we take more time to complete a theme, and the work reflects higher standards. We have more time on a topic, so you can really delve into different points of view.

When thematic learning is linked to school library resources, as it is at Western and Iroquois, students have available a wider variety of supplementary materials, including audio tapes ranging from harp music of the Andes to songs of the Civil War, to engage students who want to explore the theme even more deeply.

Even before their involvement in the High[5] Project, many teachers knew intuitively that their students would benefit from activities that connected school learning to their daily lives. For these teachers, the Project has validated these intuitions and offered tools to design activities that connect to students' life experiences. In many High[5] classrooms, teachers now employ strategies developed through the Foxfire teacher network to help

students expand and structure their own knowledge around personal concerns. Students construct books about such issues as child abuse and family violence, and they research family histories, producing family trees for display in school hallways. Activities like these foster deeper understanding of broad, underlying concepts within content areas. As one teacher whose students explore historical concepts through interviews with family members explains:

> In my seventh grade, I found a lot of kids who knew how to answer historical facts, but they didn't know how to think historically. That's changing. History is a vehicle to help them learn to think.

In other classes, themes that reflect "real world" concerns shape reading and writing activities. For example, students may read Jerry Spinelli's Maniac McGee as an orientation to the issue of homelessness. Using articles from sources as diverse as local newspapers and the Congressional Record, students also come in contact with the "voices" of homeless youth, then, in turn, use these for projects like writing letters to the editor or writing and presenting one act plays.

Given High[5] teachers' view that students draw from their life experience to learn, it is not surprising that students are beginning to create work that reveals the passions and troubles of their lives. An anthology of self-selected writings from Southern's "Topcats" team includes, among the "scary stories" of Halloween and fairy tale revisions, stories of childhood abuse, accidents, death and loss, and ethical dilemmas that sound a note of real-

life authenticity. Such writings underscore the power of learning that reflects a purpose in the context of students' lives.

A Climate of Support for Student Achievement — In many urban districts across the country, teachers point to a perceived lack of support for learning in the wider environment their students inhabit. Yet even within schools, social support for student achievement may be limited only to those students who are seen as "most promising" or "deserving" of the extra attention and opportunities that establish academics as the focus of schooling. In contrast, the High[5] schools have begun to put into place a variety of social supports for learning, both within and outside of schools.

Advisor-advisee programs now offer all students the opportunity to learn the self-development and decision-making skills that accompany success. Across all three schools, 70 teachers, support staff, and administrators have been trained in the use of an advisory curriculum called Growing Up Together, developed by the Effective Parenting Information for Children (EPIC) program, one of the resources identified through the High[5]-Edna McConnell Clark Foundation partnership. Moreover, staff of the school-based Youth Service Centers established through KERA have also trained parents in skills that aid in communication with their teenagers and help establish a shared home-school vocabulary and set of expectations for success. Teachers report that these activities also foster a classroom climate of respect that strengthens students' commitment to learning.

Within classrooms, teachers are also creating a more positive learning climate for all students. Using limited funds, High[5] language arts teachers have purchased carpets, large

pillows, and beanbag chairs to establish reading nooks in their classrooms. With corner shelves filled with magazines and books, these places offer students a relaxed atmosphere to curl up and develop a habit of reading as a lifelong pastime.

Even school routines like scheduling and grouping are changing to maximize learning. For example:

- In all schools, language arts teachers realize that implementing new teaching strategies to effect the greatest possible benefits for students means they must plan the day so that reading and English classes are scheduled back-to-back, allowing for a double period. In turn, a rescheduled school day eliminates the need for bells, and hallways seems almost empty when students from only one team at a time are changing classes.

- Some sixth grade teachers at all three schools now move into seventh grade with their students. Teacher Dina Kent says, "I've been teaching ten years now, and I don't know any factor that has contributed to success so much as going from sixth to seventh grade. The kids already know you and your expectations, so you don't waste learning time at the beginning of the year."

- At Southern, a self-contained, heterogeneous team located on the "garden level" of the school building enrolls both eighth graders and "repeating" seventh graders. Seventh graders are treated as eighth graders except that they must fulfill stipulations of a contract in order to be promoted to eighth grade mid-year.

High[5] schools have also moved assertively to involve parents in supporting their children's school performance. Southern teachers had held a summer picnic for incoming sixth graders and their families and follow-up with a pre-opening orientation to the school's expectations for all students. Early in the life of the Project, Western Middle School, where

parent involvement was the lowest of the three schools in 1989, initiated new procedures whereby each of the seven teacher teams makes monthly awards to parents for their contributions to learning, with recognition based on students' own nomination essays. Not only have parents turned out in large numbers for the awards ceremony; they have subsequently become volunteers at the school, strengthening the bridge between school and home support. In all three schools, recognition programs honor students' contributions and improvements not only for academics but also for attendance, behavior, outstanding thinking, and service learning.

In all schools, many teachers are now communicating more clearly to parents about homework and are asking parents to observe their children's reading and sign off on required assignments. Language arts teachers further build social support into learning by asking students to read to their parents for at least 15 minutes a day. "We have them read from anything - the backs of cereal boxes, recipes, or newspaper articles," explains one teacher. "We want them to be reading with an audience."

High[5] students derive additional social support for learning through a partnership with Louisville's Third Century, Inc. Among it activities, sixty companies now offer contacts that allow upwards of 85% of all High[5] eighth graders to participate in a job shadowing experience. This activity has contributed to greater awareness of the relationship between students' school program and a variety of careers.

Growing evidence of "authentic instruction" in High[5] classrooms is good news for students in the three schools. Taken together, these examples suggest that the schools are

moving irreversibly toward building a school climate characterized by what Oakes (1989) has called a "press for achievement." Along with equal access to knowledge and a climate for professional practice, a school's commitment to make the push for achievement manifest in all its activities is a key enabling condition for improved learning schoolwide.

- Student Outcomes

Improvements in the climate for teaching and learning are clearly necessary but still only partial indicators of progress. The ultimate test of reform in Louisville or elsewhere must rest on the extent to which it produces meaningful achievement gains for all students. This emphasis on student outcomes for the High[5] Project gains credibility from the broader context of school reform in Kentucky. The state's approach to assessing student progress provides a powerful framework for defining exactly what students should know and be able to do at given grade levels, including eighth grade.

In the three schools, a number of indicators suggest substantial progress toward ensuring that between sixth and ninth grades students will remain in school and will complete the middle grades on time. For example:

- Average daily attendance now registers over 90% in all three schools. Since 1989, attendance at Western in particular has improved at a rate twice that of all JCPS middle schools.

- At all schools, virtually 100% of all students were promoted in 1993. Since 1989, grade retentions in the High[5] schools have dropped at twice the rate of all JCPS middle schools.

- Between 1991 and 1993, the number of students completing grades 6-8 within three years increased in each school. Moreover, at all schools, between 97% and 100% of students

spending the last two years in the schools completed grades six through eight within three years.

- Increasing numbers of students completing the last two years in Project schools earn five Carnegie units as ninth graders. For all three schools, the percentage of successful ninth graders increased notably from 1992 to 1993, up to 54% (from 44%) at Iroquois; 57% (from 47%) at Southern; and 63% (from 57%) at Western.

Not only are more students staying in school, more are succeeding. In particular, in reading, KERA scores show that more eighth graders are moving out of the lower level into the middle level of achievement. For example:

- In reading, all three schools showed an increase in 1993 in the percentage of students scoring at the "proficient" reading level.
- All three schools showed dramatic gains in 1993 in the percentage of students scoring at the "apprentice" level, with comparable drops in students scoring at the "novice" level.
- In mathematics, Western showed increases in the percentage of students scoring at "apprentice," "proficient," and "distinguished" levels, with a dramatic drop in the percentage of students scoring at the "novice" level.
- In science, all three schools showed a reduction in students scoring at the "novice" level and an increase at the "apprentice" level.

Notably, in 1993, Western Middle School ranked as one of the top ten "most improved schools" across Kentucky, with large numbers of students moving out of the "novice" and on to the "apprentice" level in all four core subject areas of reading, math, science, and social studies. However, none of the three schools' teachers are satisfied with such gains: Thus, for example, teachers at Western have set a new goal of moving 50

students from "apprentice" to "proficient" writers over the next year, and other schools are setting similar objectives for themselves. As one principal says:

> More and more we're now looking at evidence. We're in a kind of transition period, and we're coming to the realization that we're still not where we want to be. We need to see a pay-off statistically. If we don't have the scores that support what we're doing academically, we have to question what we're doing.

Further academic gains for High[5] students in the coming years may depend to a great extent on accelerating and expanding students' access to valued knowledge, or in the Project's language "high content," in disciplines beyond language arts. This imperative emerges perhaps most strikingly in the finding that although approximately half of all the schools' eighth graders expect to enroll in college, only one-third plan to enroll in a high school college preparatory course. Clearly students need to be prepared for courses that match their aspirations.

Expanding access to valued knowledge for all students may be a particular challenge in mathematics. According to a recent report by Terry Clark of Education Resources Group, many math teachers tend to confuse innovation instructional strategies - cooperative learning or computer-assisted instruction, for instance - with curriculum content. Currently, 41% (from Western), 52% (from Southern), and 72% (from Iroquois) of the Project's eighth grade graduates enroll in Algebra 1 or higher as ninth grade students, and increasing the number of students enrolling in higher math is one of the Project's stated outcomes for the

next two years.[3] This goal suggests that High[5] teachers may need to rethink how they can enrich curriculum to meet higher standards for learning so that they can focus on offering access to more challenging mathematical content to all students beginning in the sixth grade.

- A New Paradigm for Professional Development and Professionalism

Professional development that includes teacher discussion, follow-up learning, classroom observations, and personal feedback has been thoroughly welcomed by High[5] teachers who have participated in new modes of training and who report a much stronger sense of professionalism as a result of their experiences. Indeed, the extent to which teachers have thrown themselves into new opportunities for professional development alone is testimony to teachers' willingness to engage in activities that strengthen their skills. In Changing the Odds, her 1993 book for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Anne C. Lewis provides an overview of the scope and intensity of teacher activity for professional growth in just one school over the course of the Project. She reports:

> Adding up the opportunities his 55 teachers have experienced in recent years, Skip Clemons, principal at Southern Middle School in Louisville, found 39 trained in the Socratic seminar, 14 using Writing to Learn with two of those now prepared to train others, almost 30 teachers using a parent involvement program, five teachers working with peer mediation, five using the Foxfire oral history/writing program, 30 teachers trained in cooperative learning, and an equal number trained to use cooperative discipline (p. 57).

[3]These percentages may be compared to a 26% ninth grade enrollment in Algebra 1 in Boston's non-selective high schools.

A redefinition of professional development for middle school teachers has been an unintended but critically important result of the High[5] Project. When the High[5] Project began, teachers in the three targeted middle schools were so thoroughly disillusioned with the standard fare of in-service training that they doubted the value of any professional development for improving student achievement. Five years later, these teachers will be never again be satisfied with traditional approaches to professional learning. The High[5] Project, then, has set new standards for professional development that include teacher involvement in decision-making, a focus on student achievement, the development of teacher-directed networks across schools, and the expectation that teachers will assume expanded roles to promote "best practice" in professional settings. As a result, a new climate of professionalism has taken hold in the High[5] schools.

Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making — With the initiation of a democratic, collegial planning model, the High[5] Project established that opportunities for teachers to serve in decision-making roles were, by definition, opportunities for professional growth. As Joyce Paul notes:

> From the first meetings we had with the planning and implementation group, teachers had the same authority as the principals in voting. This group and the others we've developed gives us a method for formalizing shared leaderships and enables principals and teachers to get together in moving toward a common goal.

In turn, teachers who had participated on the P & I Committee were the first to advocate similar decision-making structures at their schools and establish the expectation

that teachers would be asked to stretch themselves into new roles. Moreover, as the planning group itself has expanded, more and more teachers are exposed to decision-making roles that develop the leadership skills they can bring back to their schools.

Professional Development for Student Achievement — Increasingly, staff development nationally is moving to emphasize student outcomes. As Dennis Sparks, Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council, notes:

> Staff development has to be directed toward improved performance, not just greater job satisfaction. Staff development has to be the means to success for all kids. (Personal communication, 1993 interview).

The High[5] Project has increasingly moved toward articulating the purpose of all professional development in terms of student achievement. As a result, staff now want to know whether new strategies are resulting in improved learning outcomes. Thus, teachers and principals alike have developed a thirst for data they can use to affirm, modify, or reject new approaches. For example, teacher requests to see their KERA scores and be given personal copies of their KERA portfolios is a sign of teachers' growing willingness to assess their practice in terms of student achievement. Likewise, principals increasingly turn to achievement data to help them assess "next steps" in reform. As one principal says:

> We've been in the stage of "little tries" for a long time. Now we're ready to be more selective, look at the data for clues as to what works, where we should go from here.

Recent achievement gains for students in language arts provide evidence that what schools are doing as a result of staff development is bringing rewards. At the same time,

KERA results in mathematics suggest the need for similar efforts in that discipline. Consequently, High[5] math teachers are now beginning to work together across schools to reflect on how their teaching might become more effective. These planning discussions have, so far, resulted in a five-day summer training program designed to help 25 teachers use math manipulatives more effectively. Along with training came "math boxes" stocked with new materials for each teacher to take back to her classroom. The approach is in keeping with the High[5] commitment to sustained professional development tied to content areas and enriched with practical classroom materials.

Teachers as Instructional Leaders — Over the life of the Project, teachers have found a variety of ways to share their new knowledge and skills with colleagues. As many of the teachers involved in the planning committee have become leaders in their own schools, one of the principals reports, the school now has "a lot of instructional leaders, not just me." And as teachers have become instructional leaders, they have spawned a variety of teacher networks to disseminate and support application of new teaching and learning strategies. For example:

- High[5] and other teachers using Socratic seminars now meet monthly on their own time to exchange ideas and support. Like these meetings, an annual end-of-the-year event for teachers who employ "seminaring" in their classrooms features Socratic discussion of selected topics so that teachers can practice what they preach: Teaching students to use their minds well.

- Twenty teachers trained in Writing to Learn are current working to compile a book of lessons devised by teachers from all three schools.

- Eight social science teachers from Western Middle School meet with librarian Linda Young to learn strategies for learning that draw on a variety of resources beyond the standard textbook.

- In well-attended monthly meetings of the recently created High[5] Math Council, teachers discuss strategies that are effective in their classrooms and, more boldly, demonstrate these strategies for each other in "sharing time" exclusively reserved for this purpose. In a similar vein, the new "Science Alliance" will focus on strengthening teachers' skills in the science area for the purpose of improved student achievement.

These networks institutionalize continual, learner-centered, school-based staff development for teachers who want to try new methodologies in specific content areas. Peer feedback and coaching available through the networks also encourages a confidence that supports risk-taking: Says one Southern teacher:

> We used to fear failure and not take risks. Now we've gotten so that taking risks is second nature. I know I feel different. I feel like I have the answers instead of searching for them all the time. And if I don't, someone else does.

With new skills and confidence, more and more High[5] teachers are ready to take on roles in other schools as teacher consultants experienced in strategies such as Foxfire, the Algebra Project, and Integrated Language Arts; in fact, the expectation that teachers trained in new strategies will become staff developers for others is explicitly built into such programs as Writing to Learn and Integrated Language Arts. This strategy of nurturing teachers as staff developers to disseminate new understandings strategically leverages funds invested in professional development for broader impact.

Sharing New Knowledge in Professional Settings — Teachers who have become instructional leaders at their schools have also increasingly taken on responsibilities for disseminating new knowledge and skills in professional settings outside the district. For example, over the past three years, some 100-odd teachers have presented workshops at national conferences, including those of the National Middle School Association and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Others act as co-presenters with nationally-known staff development figures as Dennis Gray of Socratic Seminars in San Diego and Beverly Bimes-Michalak of the Council for Basic Education. Teachers also increasingly write proposals to support their own ideas for classroom innovation. Few teachers pursued such opportunities prior to the High[5] Project.

Teachers' confidence in a broader range of professional roles did not develop by chance. With the help of the Urban Youth Initiative of North Carolina's Center for Early Adolescence, teachers learned how to design and present workshops so that they could contribute at professional conferences. According to one teacher:

> This probably helped me more than anything else. I found out that you don't have to know everything or be an expert to share ideas with others. Once you understand how to do it, it's an easy step. I never knew how you gave a presentation. I thought you had to be invited.

All these new roles reveal the extent to which High[5] professional development has contributed to teachers' own revitalization as professionals.

- Improved Professional Climate Within Schools

A final result of the High[5] Project is an improved professional climate at the three middle schools. For example, at Southern Middle School, teachers, several administrators, and a school social worker gather voluntarily after classes are over for their monthly "Think Tank" meeting. Since the 1992-93 school year, they have used these meetings to reflect on and discuss issues pertaining to the school climate, professional growth of staff, and student performance. In this friendly forum, Southern's educators have designed innovative approaches to improve student engagement and achievement in school, and to create incentives for student and staff improvement and parent involvement. Over refreshments, "think tank" participants informally air grievances and voice concerns about school-wide problems that go beyond the boundaries of a particular team. Meetings draw about fifteen teachers every month. "We'd get more," says teacher Nancy Robison, "But our teachers are so involved in other teacher networks that sometimes we're 'meeting-ed out.'"

High[5] teachers are increasingly interacting with one another to create a more collegial atmosphere in all three schools. Hardin reports that educators are "spontaneously applauding each other for classroom achievements, especially when they recognize that a peer has overcome difficulty." Reflecting on these and other change in climate for professionals in her school, one educator finally notes:

> The biggest change is that we can now look beyond the teacher contract for solutions to our problems. This is not something this faculty could have done ten years ago when we were pulling the contract out whenever anyone talked about change. We've

begun to see that what happens to our kids depends on us being different.

Challenges of the High[5] Project for Middle School Reform

Louisville's High[5] Project can be called a success by almost any measure. Its strategic use of limited resources to begin middle school reform in the most neglected schools is unique among the country's urban districts. Signs of student achievement gains, teacher professionalism and empowerment, and positive school climate in the three targeted schools are all cause for optimism about the potential for reform in disadvantaged schools across the country and in other middle schools in Jefferson County.

Jefferson County's High[5] middle schools have awakened to the possibilities for become high achieving schools where all students succeed. But if the success of the High[5] Project offers lessons for school reformers, it also raises dilemmas and questions about school reform that challenge educators and leaders in Louisville and all urban districts.

- Professional Development As Leverage for Middle School Reform

The High[5] Project did not begin as a staff development initiative, but over time it has evolved in that direction as staff have tried various approaches to middle school reform, listened to teachers about what worked, and refined the most successful programs. This evolution paralleled a growing realization that if the schools could not effect changes in teaching, they would not bring about desired changes in learning. Because the Project

backed up this position with substantial investment in teacher empowerment and skill-development, students and their schools will reap ongoing benefits. As one teacher notes:

> The Project will have significant impact beyond the life of the project because it is providing [students] skills to use in the real world. It also gave many of us very useful training that will be used long after the life of the project..."

As High[5] Project planners and teachers have discovered their own direction, they have concluded that staff development must target school-based teams of teachers. When teams of teachers participate in intensive, long-term professional development with a focus on student achievement, these teachers develop a strong sense of camaraderie nurtured by shared experience and goals. In turn, this camaraderie enhances the likelihood that teachers will actually use new strategies not in their classrooms but to energize the entire school. As one teacher observed:

> The High[5] training was real different from anything we had before. You can have all the workshops you want, but if you spread it across the district, there's one teacher here, one teacher there, and you don't have the support. With us, it's all knit together.

As a result teachers once disillusioned with professional development now see the power of intensive programs for reform in their schools. In fact, since few pre-service programs focus specifically on middle-level schooling (Scales, 1992), on-the-job professional development may represent the sole opportunity for current middle-grades teachers, many of whom may be prepared only for elementary or high-school-level teaching, to learn up-to-date strategies that work with young adolescents.

Yet if the involvement of teacher teams in planning and implementing professional development is one of the Project's strengths, it is also a vulnerability. For once Project staff made the decision to involve and listen to teachers, it had little choice but to endorse professional development that was flexible, school-based, practical, and long-term with follow-up. And since the district's more conventional professional development infrastructure did not offer the kind of professional development that teachers identified as valuable, the Project felt itself compelled to implement its own programs outside the usual settings.

Thus, while the Project now has the trust and engagement of teachers and a reputation for effective programs, it has had little impact within the district's established professional development circles. This is a loss to all. While many eighth grade teachers in other middle schools feel overwhelmed by the demands of KERA, especially in relation to portfolio requirements, teachers in High[5] schools report that the training they have received has "helped us not be so adamant in relation to KERA; our teachers are just up and running.'

Given its record of success, and the commitment of the High[5] Project to leverage professional development to effect reforms that enable schools to meet KERA thresholds and students to meet KERA performance standards, the Project's successful professional development strategies should inform professional development throughout the district. Until the district reassesses its overall approach to current professional development practice and structure, the lessons of the Project can have only limited influence.

- Time for Reform

School reform takes time, and schools feel that truth most keenly in the demand on individual teachers and the principal to make time for the extra responsibilities for reform without reducing the commitment to their usual tasks. When reform revolves around professional development, schools face specific challenges and dilemmas within a limited range of choices related to their allocation of time. For example, as Hardin notes, "There is not any one good set time to do the training and implementation of programs." On one hand, he points out, after-school and summer programs have caused teachers to feel overextended and overworked. On the other hand, school-day programs present problems in finding substitutes.

The dilemma of finding time for reform may become even more wrenching as teachers begin to execute broader roles and responsibilities as change agents, collegial coaches, and staff developers. For example, Beverly Bimes-Michalak reflects that as teachers move toward assuming leadership of summer institutes, they will need time for "up front" advance planning, for reflection and in-depth conversations over a two-week period, and for follow-up and attention to individual teachers. Moreover, while many teachers wish to respond to the higher expectations inherent in a new roles, they do not want to abandon their classrooms entirely or sacrifice the follow-up component and the attention given to each individual teacher.

Principals face similar dilemmas in reallocating time for reform, both their own and that of their teachers. On one hand, principals must provide administrative support for

reform by arranging for substitutes and scheduling time for whole teacher teams to be away from their classrooms. They must also support peer observations and coaching by creating time and space for regular discussion of classroom activities among teachers. On the other hand, principals also need opportunities to strengthen their own skills as instructional leaders and keep pace with their teachers. Indeed, if principals do not understand the potential of new instructional strategies for improving achievement, they may fail to set aside time for the study groups and peer coaching that are essential to implementation.

Finding time for reform is clearly an ongoing challenge in High[5] schools. The "solutions" devised by teachers facing this challenge across the country suggest that until additional resources and staff are available, schools can resolve this challenge in only temporary ways. In the absence of such extra resources, High[5] educators will need to continue to draw their rewards from the professional satisfaction they derive from improvements in student achievement and collegial relationships.

- Pace of Reform

Just as reform demands additional time from school professionals, it demands the passage of time before changes can take hold. As Howard Hardin reflects:

> We had no idea how much time change would take. When we began, I thought we'd be able to change in three years. And we did see indicators like grade retentions change. But it wasn't until the fourth year that you began to feel the culture was changing and the teachers were beginning to talk to the students in terms of what we could do for students rather than how students should be different.

In fact, the Project's approach to school reform is implicitly deliberate. As Iroquois teacher Cheryl Rigsby explains, "We started with a small nucleus of teachers to model new approaches. Finally it has encompassed the entire faculty." Yet this "ripple-out" strategy, by definition, implies a slow pace of change. Moreover, teachers come to reform in different ways. While some are risk-takers, others adopt a "wait and see" attitude, and although the latter eventually "come on board," their caution can grate on teachers who want to see a quick pay-off for their efforts. As one teacher notes:

> I got really disturbed when we first started all these programs. At first it didn't move quickly enough. I'd been working on it for a year. Now I know this really does take time.

In fact, those closest to reform may become especially impatient because the gradual emerging of results stands in such sharp contrast to the effort they are making every day. This gap between daily effort and delayed results can create frustration. As one teacher reports:

> We were all just starving for something, and we all just jumped at everything we could, thinking this is what we needed. It really took a toll on us...

Those who do throw themselves into reform find it hard to sustain early levels of effort over time. As another remarks:

> All the opportunities for in-service were so exciting.... I think it's turned around this school. But now we'll pull back a little. A lot of us now are on overload. Some teachers are saying I can't do any more than I'm doing. A lot of us have said we need time to get better, think about what we've learned.

High[5] principals also worry about how to balance the urgency for change with a pace of change that does not wear down or burn out teachers with a series of "bold, new initiatives." Says one:

> I'm real cautious and careful and concerned about the faculty. These kids require a lot of us, and faculty give so much. They work hard, and we have to feel the work has been for good reason. I'm concerned about people getting tired.

Yet the principals are also acutely aware of the need to continue to produce growth in the areas where student gains are evident and to jump-start gains in areas that have been neglected. In particular, they point to the need to strengthen teaching and learning in math, science, and social studies through efforts that parallel those in writing and reading. As one principal explains:

> We're faced with a whole new education reform package, and it's a lot of stress for teachers. We have a lot of people wanting to do the right things, and we know there's a lot we still need to learn. We're not resting on our laurels. You can feel the difference, but the data need to support change.

None of the High[5] schools intend to "rest on their laurels." But principals, teachers, and planners alike will have to grapple with finding a balance between the need to produce measurable results in new areas and the need for time to reflect on and consolidate past gains. At this point, those most involved are inclined to focus even more pointedly on strategies that can reap the greatest rewards in specific areas, using data to inform their judgments. Their intention is to do so without sacrificing the spirit of risk-taking and experimentation that energized the Project for the first five years.

Conclusion

The High[5] Project in Jefferson County clearly benefits from a context in which "new initiatives" have been welcomed and encouraged. Yet the High[5] initiative has taken a direction that reflects more closely the knowledge of what constitutes effective practice at the middle level, is more compatible with the real needs of teachers, and is more immediately applicable to classroom practice than earlier efforts. In taking a direction that was clearly school-focused, developed with and for teachers who participated in both planning and implementing programs, the Project has begun to demonstrate the possibilities for reform in urban middle schools, including the most disadvantaged. In doing so, it has revealed implications for the district's broader funding and professional development efforts. Those at the forefront of designing the High[5] program would be the first to admit that the job of reforming middle schools in general and helping teachers retool for success in particular has just begun. At the same time, it is clear from teachers' responses to the High[5] Project that the teachers involved will never again confuse a six-hour workshop with meaningful professional growth. The "high content" and "high support" available through the Project has, ultimately, solidified teachers' own "high expectations" for themselves as professionals. In turn, empowered teachers are nurturing more empowered learners.

At the core of the High[5] Project are five concepts summarized in the mantra "high expectations, high content, high support, high energy, high involvement." These standards for improving the educational experiences of students, especially those who struggle against increasing poverty, inadequate housing, and, often, social conditions that offer limited

opportunity for improved futures, are a call for raising the expectations for students' academic success, enriching the content of students' school experiences, and providing the personal and social support necessary to bolster student performance. In Louisville, some have also judged these to be standards for high expectations, content, and support in teachers' own learning. This assessment and the logical investment in professional development that follows from that has established a lasting foundation for school reform in Jefferson County's poorest middle schools.

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